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Published in:

Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Röttger, K. (2009). F@ust vers. 3.0: a (hi)story of theatre and media. *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación*, 6, 33-48.

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Kati Röttger

F@ust vers. 3.0: A (Hi)story of Theatre and Media

*I knew there could be light not moon-light start light day light
and candle light, I knew I knew I saw the lightning light,
I saw it light, I said I I must have the light,
and what did I do oh what did I too I said
I would sell my soul all through but I knew I knew
that electric light was all true ...
(Gertrude Stein: Doctor Faustus Lights the Light!*

1.0. Prelude

Already in his lifetime the historic healer, astrologer, alchemist, “magician and necromancer” (Benz, 3) Dr. Georg Fausten (around 1480 – 1540) became part of media history: the magical practices of the traveling erudite, his familiarity with handling smoke, crystal balls and other media that he used to foretell the future gave him a legendary status. The stories that were told about his deeds soon generated the Faust-legend that to this day has been handed down in countless adaptations and variations.

Fausten provides many starting points for a media-historic analysis: about 40 years after his death, earlier *oral accounts* of the legend were followed by the first *written accounts* of the various Faust-stories and were published by the typographer Spies in Frankfurt/Main as the chapbook “Historia von D. Johann Fausten” in 1587. Thanks to the then infant *typographic technology*, the chapbook spread quickly – after the Bible it was the second most-read book in Germany – making its way to England where, one year later, as a *dramatic text* it became part of theatre history in Christopher Marlowe's adaptation (first published in 1604). Marlowe started a long tradition of dramaturgic adaptations, *theatre performances* and, at the time, especially *puppet theatre* that even 200 years later inspired Goethe to his poetic Faust version. Since then, the Faust material has been treated over and over again not only in literature and on stage but also in *visual arts*¹, *music*, *opera*, *ballet*, *movies* and *television*.

1.1. Preliminary Reflections on Media Theory

Right at the outset of my reflections a problem emerges that is inherent in any media-historical perspective and any media-theoretical analysis: namely, the formulation of a useful and widely applicable definition of media. On the one hand, the occasional synonymous use of the terms “technologies” and “media”, and, on the other hand, the interdependence of various media

¹ See Wegner, Wolfgang: *Die Faustdarstellungen vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Amsterdam: Verlag der Erasmus Buchhandlung, 1962.

and different art genres, or rather, a more or less effective correlation of various sign systems inherent in every symbolic representation make it difficult to distinguish clearly between apparatuses, art forms and media. According to Joachim Paech, the central problem of present research in the field of intermediality is that the presentation of one artistic form (i.e. a novel) in another (i.e. film) is nothing more than a transfer of contents from one container into another². Thus, the distinction between the definitions of “artistic form” and “medium” becomes vague because it is uncertain what specific areas terms such as “medium” or “mediality” cover (see Paech 17). The major difficulty in defining a medium lies in the fact that “the medium as such cannot be observed since it appears only in the form that the medium itself creates” (Paech, *Mediales Differenzial* 23). While Paech solves this problem by developing an intermedial theory of transformation³ that is based implicitly on Niklas Luhmann's concept of *form* (see Luhmann 6-15), German philosopher Sybille Krämer further expands Marshall McLuhan's structuralist media-historic approach.⁴ “Media function like window panes: the more transparent they are, the better they fulfill their tasks” (Krämer, *Spur* 74). With this statement she reformulates McLuhan's well-known dictum that the content of a medium is always another medium (see McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 8).⁵ At the same time Krämer criticizes Luhmann's designations of medium and form based on the observation that his very concept of “medium” is neutralized and suspended from any meaning by the capacity to adopt various forms that he ascribes to it.

According to Krämer, this system-theoretical point of view tacitly rests on the traditional semiotic distinction between signifier and signified (Krämer, *Spur* 77), which inevitably brings any *media*-theoretical research geared towards the “language” of materiality to a dead end. Therefore, Krämer suggests a two-step procedure to more adequately define “medium”: to distinguish it both from the concept of the signifier and from the notion of a technical instrument. She modifies the somewhat simplistic equation of medium and message following the tenets of Derrida's philosophy of writing, which leads her to the conclusion that, “The medium is not simply the message; rather, the trace of the medium is inscribed in the message” (Krämer, *Spur* 81) just as there can be no language outside speech, writing or gestural articulation while each of them leave their traces on

2 See especially page 15 in Paech, Joachim: “Mediales Differenzial und transformative Figurationen”, in: Helbig, J. (ed.): *Intermedialität. Theorie und Praxis eines interdisziplinären Forschungsgebiets*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt-Verlag, 1998. 15-30. For a discussion of *media switch* see Balme, Christopher: *Einführung in die Theaterwissenschaft*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt-Verlag, 1999. 154.

3 “Transformations” are “forms of differentiation operating during the transfer from one form to another, so that the less advanced form becomes the medium of the more advanced one.” Paech 1999: 23.

4 McLuhan defines a medium as everything that serves to extend one's own sensorium. See McLuhan, Marshall: *Understanding Media*. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1964.

5 To explain that the medium is the message even when its “contents” hide the medium's real nature McLuhan uses the example of electric light: light remains “pure information” without “a message” when it does not illuminate for example an advertisement text letter by letter, like the projection of a film where the projection surface usually remains unnoticed (compare McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 8-9).

language. In order to grasp more than the instrumental dimension of the media, which assumes particular importance when – following the contemporary technological discourse – media are conceived primarily as technical media, Krämer distinguishes between “‘tools’, understood as technical instruments” and “‘apparatuses’, regarded as technical media” (Krämer, *Spur* 84). However, Krämer does not consider this distinction as any sort of master plan, but rather embraces its discontinuity. Her primary aim is to differentiate between functions: while technology understood as a tool is a labour-saving device (increasing efficiency), technology regarded as apparatus creates artificial worlds. The function of “*world creation* is the productive significance of media technology” (Krämer, *Spur* 85).

1.2. Media Theoretical Reflections on Theatre

This definition is significant for a media theoretical analysis of theatre insofar as it can help to clarify the question of a mediality of theatre that so far remains unsolved.⁶ It is striking, for example, that although Joachim Fiebach in his essay on communication and theatre (1998) identifies structural similarities between theatre and other (new) media from a historical perspective ultimately he denies theatre the status of a medium:

A theatrical event, however, constitutes a fundamentally different reality than a media event. [...] The quasi-grounded corporeality that determines all activity in theatre creates an essentially different communicative situation and mediates different experiences than mediatizations. [...] Under such circumstance theatre could take on a potentially irreplaceable social function – as an immediate interpersonal activity, as an encounter of living bodies that communicate without any machinery distancing them. (Fiebach 162, 167)

Here, Fiebach seems to apply an instrumental-technological concept of “apparatus” to define media which among other things also excludes instruments of world creation that are tied to the human body such as the human voice or gestural articulation and thus automatically excludes theatre.⁷ Petra Maria Meyer in turn proposes to establish “theatre studies as media studies” (Meyer 115) especially in view of the fact that – as she rightly points out – no set of analytic devices that can be used for an intermedial analysis is available for the field of media studies. Like Paech, she resorts to semiotics⁸ in her attempt to define a “general theory of medial transformations”. Thus, she can only partially support her premise that the immanently “pluri-medial perspective” of theatre

⁶ See in this context the most recent clarifications concerning this problem in: Chapple, Freda & Kattenbelt, Chiel (ed.): *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2006.

⁷ This limited definition of media leads not only to the assertion that “oral culture(s) are not medial, because in their case the encounter of bodies is not mediated by an apparatuses” (Fiebach 1998: 103) but also locates the beginning of the correspondence between structural elements of theatre and media not until the end of WW I and the wide spread use of electronic image media.

⁸ Compare Zima, Peter V. (ed.): *Literatur intermedial: Musik – Malerei – Photographie – Film*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995.

studies is the most adequate for a “genuine model of media studies”. Her approach virtually annihilates the very “*differencia specifica* that distinguishes theatre from other media” (Meyer 120) by theoretically conceptualizing the distinctive features of a pluri-medial theatre performance using an extended textual model of *écriture*⁹. Meyer ascribes “a literate model” to an analysis of theatre that automatically turns all media operating in theatre into literature and thus neutralizes their potential for material difference. As a consequence, Meyer only defines theatre as a text-based medium.

1.3. Towards an Intermediality of Theatre

Krämer's concept of media, when applied to theatre, can certainly help to clarify terminological uncertainties in the debate as long as theatre is considered simply an “apparatus for creating artificial worlds.” However, such an approach completely comprises neither the specific medial status of theatre, nor the *intermedial inter-relation* between particular sign constellations that constitute theatre. First, it is not a specific medium of “theatre” that leaves traces on the messages of theatre (as a medium) but rather an interplay of multiple (constantly interchangeable) media (such as gesticulation, voice, music or dance). Second, theatre can integrate a variety of technical apparatuses (like film or television) to create artificial worlds without losing its status as theatre. These truly intermedial components or capacities of theatre need to be analyzed more precisely. Starting from Jürgen E. Müller's assumption that “a medial product is intermedial when it transports the multimedial coexistence¹⁰ of medial quotations and elements into a conceptual cooperation, whose (aesthetic) fractures and dislocations open up new dimensions of sensation and experience,” (Müller 31) the crucial point of intermedial configuration becomes the (aesthetic) *transfer* of one medium into another. McLuhan's “fundamental question” concerning the conditions of “exchange and translation” (McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy* 13) between media is useful to narrow down the aspect of translation in the context of theatre. By adopting an anthropological perspective, McLuhan draws a distinction between the mediality of human senses and that of technical tools¹¹ which for

9 Compare among others: Barthes, Roland: *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*. Paris: 1953; Derrida, Jacques: *Die Schrift und die Differenz*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1972; Kristeva, Julia: *Die Lust am Text*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1974.

10 For more information on multimedial theatre see Pavis, Patrice: *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*. Paris: Dunot, 1996. 222.

11 In the field of communication theory, compare Harry Pross' differentiation of media into primary, secondary and tertiary media.

I. Primary media: the media connected to the human body, like facial expression, gesticulation, movement, voice and spoken language. Human senses suffice to transport and receive messages. No equipment mediates between sender and receiver.

II. Secondary media: they comply with the requirements of mechanical apparatuses / instruments / technologies for the production of messages: signals, optical instruments, print, typography etc.

III. Tertiary media: they comprise mediation processes that require electronic technologies such as radio, telephone or computer.

him include technical devices such as radio. He claims that no dynamic translations can take place between “these massive extensions of the senses” since they constitute “closed systems”. For McLuhan the human senses, in turn, are fully able to translate experiences from one sensory field to another. Therefore, they do not constitute closed systems that are incapable of interplay but rather open and incomplete configurations that can – due to their rationality – “mutually translate all our senses into one another” and thus, following Müller, open up new dimensions of sensation and experiences in an intermedial cooperation.¹² Theatre, which both on the production as well as on the reception end relies on the presence of the human body and its specific sensorium while being basically open to integrate secondary and tertiary media, can provide this capacity for translation and thus functions *as an open, dynamic configuration of medial translations (transpositions)*. At the same time, within its historical context, theatre is identical with those media¹³ that organize its structural elements into a dynamic and constant process that translates countless differentiations *within* them.

How does this process take place? And what has its media-distinctive quality to do with the theatrical process of visualization? It is especially notable in this context that Sybille Krämer, uses the metaphor of the stage as “a key image” for her philosophical model with reference to the concept of intermediality:

A medium is always preceded by something; but what precedes it is presented in another medium and never outside a medium. If this is the case, however, then intermediality is a fundamental phenomenon in the sphere of media. Media become 'epistemic objects' only at the moment when one medium leaves the “stage” for another medium, which itself becomes a “form-in-a-medium.” (Krämer, *Konstitutionsleistung* 85)

1.4. Theatre as an Intermedial Event and Cultural Practice

Defining theatre as an intermedial event opens up the possibility of conceptualizing theatre within a single universal and ideal framework while maintaining an 'open form' in all its potential configurations – as artifact or as ritualized repetition of particular actions, as pantomime or vocal performance, or as dance or multimedial spectacle.

A significant component of this open concept of theatre is the assumption that 'we ... [cannot] categorize things into media, and non-media.' This premise from Krämer's 2003 article “*Thesen über die Rolle medientheoretischer Erwägungen beim Philosophieren*” (“*Theses About The*

Pross, Harry: *Medienforschung*. Darmstadt: Habel, 1973.

12 McLuhan uses the example of language to explain this process: “Language is metaphor in the sense that it not only stores but translates experience from one mode into another.” McLuhan 1969, 13.

13 These, in turn, include the questions, principles and concepts that were developed in the course of their history, each of them in its own context. See Müller 1998, p.31.

Role Of Media-Theoretical Reflections For Philosophy”) that opens up an intermedial perspective allows me to expand my reflections on the intermediality of theatre in three important aspects: 1. Embodiment: the constitutive function of the media, 2. The Performative: the phenomenalizing function of the media, and 3. Intermediality as an epistemic condition of media perception.

1. Media should not be defined in an essentialist manner but by building on Luhmann's form-medium relation understood as a potential for differentiation and as a structuring repertoire. From this perspective, *mediality* can be defined as the potential for differentiation and structuring that reveals itself in the transfer process from one medium into another during which the aesthetic neutrality (the imperceptibility) of a medium can disappear when it becomes a form. “ What counts as a medium and what as a form, when a description is made completely depends on the cognitive interests and the observer's vantage point” (Krämer, *Konstitutionsleistung* 84). Theatre can make this process perceivable for its audience since visible and audible phenomena reveal their medial nature when they are transferred from one medium to another (i.e. a text recorded on a tape can be rendered verbally by an actor or it can be visualized by projecting its script etc.). What is decisive is that the very act of transfer shapes and delimits the media. Thus, this concept of mediality opens up a descriptive perspective on the world. The medium becomes a figure of mediation which cannot be measured adequately in semiotic or technical terms because the act of transposition functions as an *embodiment* in a particular medium. This function is a modification of Krämer's idea of the trace that imprints itself on the message of the medium. Embodiment, in turn, should not be understood as a preceding corporeality but rather as the assumption of a form in the sense of incorporation. In the process of transformation from one medium to another the form is not a mere container for some contents. Embodiment instead denotes an alteration or an undermining of the embodied in the act of transposition. One must not analyze media in the secondary sense of a sign *a priori* (as pure containers of messages) nor in the primary sense of a technological *a priori* (as messages themselves) but rather from a *cultural-anthropological perspective* which shows

... how, in an act of transposition that which is transposed by media is at the same time co-created and stamped by them. It is the idea of 'embodiment' as a culturally fundamental activity which makes it possible to identify 'transposition' as 'constitution' and to understand it. (Krämer, *Konstitutionsleistung* 85)

By guaranteeing the constitutive role of media within cultural practice the historicity of media is also guaranteed.

2. Embodiment and transposition are *performative* elements. This assumption allows us to consider theatre as an *event*. Theatre is no longer merely a surface of signs that can simply be

decoded or are hidden *behind* phenomena and therefore invisible. Such a ultimately semiotic perspective decodes and analyzes theatre only as a particular form of a pre-existing (cultural) system that – within a two-world ontology – belongs to a 'different' register of existence. An analysis of theatre from a performative perspective, in turn, considers the phenomena connected with the constitution of meaning such as speech and image to be *temporal events*. Theatre becomes a medium that *phenomenalizes*, that makes something appear and thus accessible to the senses. It requires participation. Accordingly, the staging always puts 'something' on stage which consequently becomes something else since, “the phenomena are always richer than their conceptualization” (Krämer, *Konstitutionsleistung* 83). The performative, in other words, preserves the surplus of that 'something' which is being performed. *The essence is not invisible and situated behind phenomena. On the contrary: what is essential manifests itself in the performance event.* The concept of *staging* becomes a key component of the process of phenomenalization through transposition, “in every manner of creating, in the act of conveying that media allow and reveal” (Krämer, *Konstitutionsleistung* 85). *Theatre thus fulfills a paradigmatic function for every media theory by providing the key-scenery of distinction and visualization of multiple media.*

3. Media open up and stage perspectives onto the world. Since we perceive, communicate, and recognize everything within and by media the mediality of all existing things manifests this perspectivity. Accordingly, media, with their capacity to differentiate and transpose, cannot be treated individually since they can only exist in relationship with other media. This observation is also true for theatre. *Theatre as an intermedial event reveals and stages media which it makes perceivable.* Only when a medium becomes a form and can thus be transposed in another medium can it become the subject of any theoretical discussion. Thus, “Intermediality becomes an epistemic condition for the knowledge of media” (Krämer, *Konstitutionsleistung* 82). Based on the premise that perspectivity is always also a mode of theatricality, mediality and theatricality become epistemic conditions for intermediality. Vice versa, the intermediality of theatre makes it possible to perceive the medial modalities within which the visible and the audible, image and speech, are disclosed.

The potential for differentiation that media provide and which is based on the self-revelation of media in the very process of differentiation should not to be interpreted in terms of system construction but rather as a *cultural practice*. Media constitute something, but they do not create anything *ex nihilo* and are certainly no longer confined within closed systems. Media do not produce anything but restructure and stage new interrelations, new perspectives, and new viewpoints of the world. It matters little whether we consider theatre to be art or cultural technology; what is of utmost relevance for a definition of theatre as a medium of vision is that it is a temporal event.

1.5. Faust Intermedial

It is common knowledge in secondary literature that Goethe's *Faust* tells the story of the modern subject of knowledge in search of meaning in an external world.¹⁴ Based on the theoretical background that I have outlined above, the following section concentrates on the *media* and their representations in this search for meaning: Faust, the renaissance-man, turns away not only from the four cardinal sciences but also from the classical media in which they are taught (namely books and optical instruments)¹⁵ and resorts to the “invisible” medium of magic to satisfy his thirst for knowledge. Mephistopheles, the diabolic magician, promises an instantaneous effect of the magic and augurs to overcome space and time as a quasi harbinger of electricity. In a phantasmal way Mephisto puts Faust in arbitrary, sometimes synchronous worlds and times, sets off projection apparatuses, procures (fantastic) images and helpful apparitions to satisfy any of Faust's wishes for sense and sensuality. This 'classical-romantic media spectacle'¹⁶ takes place in the theatrical space of representation to which the “Prelude” of *Faust I* directly refers and which the whole work (I and II) repeatedly questions. Halbach and Faßler¹⁷ formulate this central quest in *Faust* for a truthfulness of those contents that are mediated 'by' a medium as the question whether “[...] everything we know results from our perceptions and their transformation into knowledge and [whether] everything we possess are 'constructions’”¹⁸ This query about the possibility of a symbolic representation of the world and about the status of media of representation as guarantors of “truth” or “deception”, “reality” or “illusion” in their relation to the possibility of gaining (true) awareness and knowledge is a central topic of *Faust*. In the following section I analyze Goethe's *Faust* as a model for “intermedial theatre” by looking at the contemporary, digital theatre production *F@ust vers. 3.0* (1999) by the Catalan group *La Fura dels Baus*. In my analysis I use the

14 See for example Erich Trunz's paper in Trunz, Erich (ed.): *Goethe: Faust*. München: C.H. Beck, 1998. 470.

15 Compare Faust's monologue: “Woe! am I stuck and forced to dwell / Still in this musty, cursed cell? / [...] Hemmed in by all this heap of books, / Their gnawing worms, amid their dust, / While to the arches, in all the nooks, / Are smoke-stained papers midst them thrust, / Boxes and glasses round me crammed, / And instruments in cases hurled, / Ancestral stuff around me jammed- / That is your world! That's called a world! / And still you question why your heart / Is cramped and anxious in your breast?” *Faust*, V. 398-411. This and all further quotes are cited from Goethe, *Faust. The First Part Of The Tragedy*. Translated by George Madison Priest, <http://www.levity.com/alchemy/faust02.html>, viewed on September 6, 2007 unless stated otherwise.

16 Already in the 18th century a renunciation of typography and industrial machinery began to surface. The romantic counter-reaction helped the discovery of electricity as an instantaneous and non-linear medium. Compare Stafford, Barbara Maria: *Kunstvolle Wissenschaft. Aufklärung, Unterhaltung und Niedergang der visuellen Bildung*. Amsterdam and Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1998. 201f.

17 See page 35 in Faßler, Manfred and Halbach, Wulf (eds.): *Geschichte der Medien*. München: W. Fink Verlag, 1998.

18 This is a question that Faust asks himself when he sees the signs of the macrocosm in Nostradamus' book, which leaves him ultimately unsatisfied because it is “human imagination not the Being itself” (see Trunz 1998: 517). Faust: “Into the whole how all things blend, / Each in the other working, living! / [...] What pageantry! Yet, ah, mere pageantry! / Where shall I, endless Nature, seize on thee? / Thy breasts are - where? Ye, of all life the spring, [...]” *Faust*, V. 447-455.

structural model of vision (theatre as configuration of the visual) in analogy to perception (theatre as an apparatus for world creation) and the special intermedial conditions of the realm of theatre with a special focus on images, stage, projection apparatus and digital technology.

3.0. Faust on the Net: 1999

The Catalan theatre troupe *La Fura dels Baus*¹⁹ makes the medial discourse of Goethe's *Faust I and II* the central aspect of their 1999 production *F@ust v. 3.0*:

Our Faust is a reading done by end-of-century-dwellers. Persons with a synchronous vision of the world, just like what is observed when you use the television or computer channels to relate the world [...] Persons, in short, immersed in a different span of modernity from that in which Faust was born, possibly our big brother. (*F@ust v. 3.0*. program)²⁰

With their radical adaptation of the text²¹ through fragmentation, actualization and reduction to the well-known key phrases the troupe creates a visually and acoustically accentuated intermedial spectacle that translates the history of the apparatuses of sense-**extension**, “the bloody pact with technology, the undeniable tormentor in previous eras, whether industrial or preindustrial” into the contemporary digital age. Accordingly, the group calls this new project in which they synthesize text, music, video clips, the internet, lighting effect, actors and objects “Digital theatre” (see program note). For the first time in their 20-year-history that is characterized by spectacular, sometimes martial performances that never took place in conventional theatres, the actors play in front of a auditorium with seats:

It is the spectator, who, from the theatre seat, has to decipher, within themselves [sic!], the transcendence of the myth who sold his soul to the devil. A spectator used to the sofa at home, a television format and the infinity of channels on offer, can excitedly visit the keys to their own domestic tragedy. The channel switching will be done by LA FURA. (*F@ust v. 3.0*)

This domestic tragedy unfolds along Faust's travel into the world of the internet and is triggered by the pact with Mephisto - a tragedy, that is no longer based on *the duality* of rational and phantasmagoric knowledge and the striving for “true perception” by surpassing delusion and deception, but rather on “[...] the surplus of information: fragmentary information that creates *the hallucination* of absolute knowledge, the vertigo of a false knowledge, an encyclopedism on a world wide scale” (program), that addresses the inseparability of factual knowledge and

19 For more information on the history of the troupe see for example Ingenschay, Dieter: “Strategien der Chaosbewältigung: Zur Mythopoiesis der Gewalt in *Noun* der katalanischen Theatregruppe La Fura dels Baus”, in: Ahrends, Günter and Diller, Hans-Jürgen: *Chapters from the history of stage cruelty*. Tübingen: G. Narr, 1994. 129-152.

20 Program for *F@ust v. 3.0*. Published by Fura dels Baus, Barcelona: 1998.

21 Gretchen, for example, opens the first meeting with Faust (originally: “My fair young lady, may I make so free / As to lend you my arm and company?” V. 2605-2606) by saying: “Got a lighter?”.

phantasmagoria, “[...] a whole fair of novelties which leads us from the Gutenberg Galaxy to our virtual era” (program). As a consequence, the group does not categorically separate the virtual worlds of the stage and that of the screen even though the spatial arrangement of the audience consciously associates a confrontation of both worlds. There is, however, no imaginary fourth wall (the window that provides in-sight into a constructed illusionary space) that separates stage and auditorium. Instead, the open, black stage is wrapped in the darkness that usually covers the auditorium²². It opens up onto a huge digital screen that is separated into eight rectangular segments which sometimes create a uniform video image, sometimes show simultaneous fragments or sequences of images at varying speeds, or sometimes provide glimpses of the actors who perform inside single segments that are opened like doors.

One of the highlights of intermedial screen and theatre composition is the sequence in which Gretchen becomes a murderer: video sequences of Gretchen, her mother who swallows the nightcap, watery liquid running down the screen and mixing with “blood”, a baby under water alternate at high speeds while, at the front, Faust and Mephisto have their dialogue: they seem to be integrated into the screen although one of them *de facto* is standing on stage, the other in one of the segments “behind” the screen; their voices are recorded and together with the music form a linear plot that accompanies the fast changing, contrasting, sometimes cross-faded images.

Ironic references to the apparatuses of the mechanistic, empirical but also the electrical and digital age that exclusively take place on stage reflect that the performance negotiates a confrontation between two systems of knowledge and perception as a synchronous and diachronous history of media. Various mechanical and electrical apparatuses that range up to a computer as a research tool in Faust's study are a thematic component of the stage aesthetics: a rotating mill-wheel inside a Faraday cage. The stage lighting, especially, appears as an ironically warped symbol of a “light of reason”: consistently poor lighting with flashlights and, in a few cases, with the targeted use of a spotlight that exclusively covers the faces, only partially reaching the bodies. Wagner, for example, who shows off his complacent faith in knowledge by reciting a litany of digitalization “0-1-0-1-0-1-0..” and a praise of “la vida digital” (digital life), is wearing a helmet lamp which he himself powers with a crank. If his eagerness is exhausted, Wagner literally is in the dark. Faust's monologue of inner conflict (“Two souls alas! are dwelling in my breast;” V. 1112) is introduced by an image that could be used to interpret his suicide attempt as a result of desperation in the face of an (around 1800 impossible to rationalize) “electric age”: while he puts a cable around his neck the

22 After the DJ enters, the performance opens in complete darkness from which eventually a circling beam of light lifts like the orbit of a comet but soon turns out to be the beam of a flashlight in Faust's study that Faust is holding as he is pushed on stage tied to a kind of rotating mill-wheel in a Faraday cage.

'cage' is abruptly pulled away from under his feet. Simultaneously, and accompanied by Mozart's "Requiem", an image of a oversized light bulb is projected onto the screen while the background fills with countless rigid heads. Faust is at first dangling in front of this image, then finally falls onto the stage while the light bulb bursts; he directly starts his monologue while a spotlight projects his shadow, doubly conically tapered, onto the projection screen in the background.

Only the pact with Mephistopheles removes this desperation and inner conflict by way of an intermedial cross-over of internet and theatre. Faust's affliction with an isolation of vision, the separation of illusion and projection comes to an end which, however, introduces further sufferings:

The journey begins, and here La Fura proposes one of the great challenges of the performance. The spectators begin to lose contact with their theatre seats, to submerge themselves in realities beyond the stage. Through visual resources the action delves into a video game in which you can operate on a stomach, take part in a visual fight between God and the Devil via blows with joysticks and other possibilities. (F@ust v. 3.0)

The fight between God and the Devil, between the "divine" and the "magical" eye no longer takes place in favour of an (illusionary) distanced observer (the isolated visual sense) as guarantor of objective knowledge; rather Faust's entanglement "in the Net" is addressed: this becomes most obvious on the symbolic realm of the stage rather than on the screen: following Gretchen's meeting with Faust a gigantic net is dropped from the drawing floor which is quickly tied to the stage floor and opens up the audience's gaze onto the amorous play of Marthe, Mephisto, Faust and Gretchen in the garden. The shadows of the four characters clinging onto the net are enlarged on the digital wall that now serves as a double of the net. Thus, Faust's desire for sense and sensuality is visualized in an image that not only in equal measure traps all characters but also completely abolishes the separation of projection and illusion. Baudrillard characterized the effect of digital screens and, respectively, networks, as follows:

Instead of the reflexive tendency of the mirror and the stage a non-reflective surface, an immanent surface exists where operations can unfold, the smooth operational surface of communication. Something has changed, and the Faustian, Promethean (perhaps Oedipal) period of production and consumption gives way to the 'proteanic' era of networks, to the narcissistic and protean area of connections, contacts, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface that goes with the universe of communication. [...] Little by little, a logic of 'drive' has replaced a very subjective logic of possession and projection. There are no longer fantasies of power, speed and acquisition that are tied to the object itself but in their place a tactic of potentialities [...] (Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, as cited in Fiebach 132)

Faust caught "in the Net" transmits a tactile eroticization of the gaining of knowledge that "questions the traditional access to visual space and our habitual attachment to a 'point of view' [not only to that, however!] by telesensoric, immediate communication" (deKerckhove 166): theatre

creates a virtual world²³ that captures the computer-generated virtual world within *one* image and transports it into another symbolic form beyond any idea of the space of illusion: in a synesthetic interaction with data structures, with an “immanent surface”, the obstructed mental vanishing point of an imaginary spectator, the theatre of *La Fura dels Baus* works towards a telesensoric image. Because the laws of inertia and gravity apply on stage the production stops the speed of the information flow of the screen by reflection: in contrast to *proiecere* (throw forward), *reflectare* (bend backward), the delay of reaction takes effect as opposed to simultaneous action and reaction resulting from electronic or digital media.²⁴ Thus is the function of the stage that operates between the digital wall and the auditorium; it stops the immensity of images by integrating them into its own, mechanical speed instead of excluding them. By doing that, however, it simultaneously annuls the function of bourgeois theatre as a reservation for the artificial illusion of a linear order of representation (following the key words 'literarity', 'system space', 'linearity'). In this case, theatre is no place for the rivalry of primary, secondary or tertiary medial aspects but rather integrates them in the mode of an intermedial transposition. After Faust goes blind, this process culminates in the final image. While on the big screen the (Faustian) heads appear that already appeared in the suicide scene, Faust rotates faster and faster on a metal sheet inside the “cage” that is fixed on the perpendicular central axis of the stage and thus completely dissolves a secure point of view of illusionary vision. Again, a fragment of Mozart's “Requiem” is played but the heads do not mirror the audience but get larger and larger while they pick up speed and move 'forward', away from the central vanishing point towards the spectators, as if the sublime position in which vision is stylized into a spiritual point of distanced (self-)awareness were simultaneously the location of a black hole.

Translated by Götz Dapp

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²³ Compare Artaud, Antonin: *The Theatre and its Double*. Transl. Mary C. Richards. Grove Press, New York, NY: 1958, 48: “It is that alchemy and theatre are so to speak virtual arts, and do not carry their end – or their reality – within themselves.”

²⁴ See McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 4

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